

# THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS IN SCOTLAND

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## I

IF one turns up the ecclesiastical portion of Oliver & Boyd's *Edinburgh Almanac*, one finds that particulars are given of fourteen Churches in Scotland. The list is not exhaustive, however, for several small communions, such as the Catholic Apostolic, the Glassite and the Primitive Methodist, are not mentioned. There are, moreover, a number of religious societies which partake to a certain extent of the character of religious denominations, such as the Salvation Army, the Faith Mission, and the Plymouth Brethren. I leave all these out of account, however, and, for the purposes of this paper, I discard also three small communions which are mentioned in the *Almanac*—The Unitarians, the Christian Scientists, and the Church of England in Scotland. That leaves eleven, which are either considerable Churches, or at all events historic Churches. I mention them in the order in which they occur in the *Almanac*—

The Church of Scotland,  
The United Free Church,  
The Free Church,  
The Reformed Presbyterian Church,  
The Free Presbyterian Church,  
The Original Secession Church,  
The Congregational Church,  
The Baptist Church,  
The Wesleyan Methodist Church,  
The Episcopal Church,  
The Roman Catholic Church.

Some idea of the relative numerical strength of each denomination may be gathered from the Registrar-General's Report as to marriages celebrated in Scotland. The latest available returns are for the year 1924. In that year 12.17 of the total marriages were irregular, *i.e.* were celebrated without the intervention of the Church; 41.72 were celebrated

by ministers of the Church of Scotland ; 23.69 by ministers of the United Free Church ; 0.9 by ministers of the Free Church ; 11.91 by Roman Catholic priests, and 3.01 by Episcopalian clergymen. The details for other denominations are not given. They total 6.6. Of the marriages celebrated by the Church some 75 per cent. were Presbyterian. Of the Protestant marriages 90 per cent. were Presbyterian.

If an *Edinburgh Almanac* had been published in 1527 it would probably have contained as many ecclesiastical particulars as does an almanac of the present day. But there would have been only one Church, however long the list of ecclesiastics, regular and secular, and of ecclesiastical offices and establishments. We are accustomed to think of the Reformation as having altered this, and given Scotland at least two Churches. But this certainly was not how the Reformers regarded the matter. The idea of a split—of there being two recognised Churches—was just as alien to their conceptions as to those of their opponents of the Church of Rome. There was no idea of founding a new Church in Scotland. The idea of two different Churches in the land was never entertained. The Church, and the only Church, had been or was being reformed, and being reformed it was to be the sole and only Church in Scotland, just as completely as the unreformed Church had been. That idea has not been realised, but, so far as concerns the elimination of Roman Catholicism among the indigenous Scottish population, it came much nearer realisation than the present numerical strength of Roman Catholicism in Scotland would seem to suggest.

## II

But here I must make a digression which has a bearing upon the subject-matter of this paper generally. A certain denominational infiltration is always going on under modern conditions, particularly in a commercial nation which has free intercourse with other nations. Scotland is, perhaps, more open to this influence than any other European country, owing to the immediate neighbourhood of two communities speaking the same language—England and Ireland. Immigration is no doubt the most important factor in such religious infiltration. But it is not the only factor. Even temporary residents exercise a certain influence, and temporary absentees in other lands, whether for business or for education or even for pleasure, come under extraneous religious influences and imbibe new ideas.

Immigration from Ireland and, to a certain but comparatively limited extent, from other countries accounts for the great body of the Roman Catholic population of Scotland. If we leave out of account a certain area in the Highlands, the facts in regard to which are perhaps disputable,

the number of families indigenous to, and constantly since the Reformation resident in, Scotland who are and have always been Roman Catholic is exceedingly small, almost negligible. Other forms of infiltration than simple immigration have been operative. There have too, no doubt, been cases of conversion of Protestants to Roman Catholicism. This fact has, however, not been operative to anything like the extent which is sometimes supposed. Individual cases attract attention and tend to convey an exaggerated impression. In many cases the convert is unmarried and childless.

I referred a moment ago to a certain area in the Highlands where there is a purely indigenous Roman Catholic population—an area which extends across the Highlands from Tomintoul to Barra. The religious history of this area is obscure. At one time it was generally represented that it was a district into which the Reformation never penetrated and which simply remained Roman Catholic as it always had been. But this has been called in question, and the adhesion of this district to Roman Catholicism is represented as being the result of zealous missionary work of Roman Catholic priests, particularly in the time of the later Stuarts. Into this discussion I do not adventure. I remark, however, that whilst the statement that the Reformation never penetrated this district may not be true in the sense that the population remained throughout the century which followed the Reformation devoutly Roman, it is true in the sense that the Reformation as a spiritual awakening never reached this district. For more than a century and a half after the Reformation the religious provision made by the Reformed Church for the district was of the most meagre and unsatisfactory character. The people, too, had not the Holy Scriptures in their own tongue. That was, of course, an immense handicap to Protestantism in competition with Roman Catholicism.

What I have said accounts for one great religious division in Scotland. The Reformed Church almost, but not quite, supplanted the Roman Catholic Church. The latter has reasserted itself mainly through the influence of infiltration in one or other of its forms.

### III

I turn now to another historic Church—the Scottish Episcopal Church. There is very considerable misconception as to the history of this Church prior to the Revolution Settlement. In a certain sense this Church did not exist until after that Settlement. But lest any Episcopalian may take offence at this remark, I hasten to say that in the same special sense the Presbyterian Church did not exist until after that Settlement. I

listened recently to an address by a distinguished prelate of the Scottish Episcopal Church, in which he stated his view as to what the Episcopal Church had done for Scotland before the Revolution Settlement, and what the Presbyterian Church had done. But that, in my view, was an erroneous treatment of the matter. There would have been reason in it if the speaker had explained what members of the Church of Scotland who favoured Episcopacy and members of that Church who favoured Presbytery had respectively accomplished. The conception of two Churches in Scotland—a Presbyterian Church and an Episcopalian Church—was just as foreign to the ideas of the seventeenth century as the conception of two Churches—a Protestant one and a Roman Catholic one—had been to the Reformers. The question at issue was not—which is the true Church, but what should be the form of government in the one and only Church. The history of the Church which comprehended what is now the Church of Scotland and what is now the Scottish Episcopal Church is a contemporaneous history from the Reformation to the Revolution. Episcopalians can no more ignore Andrew Melville as one of their ancestors than Presbyterians can ignore Archbishop Spottiswoode. During the nineteenth century France was, I think, thrice under monarchical government and thrice a republic, but the history of France and of the French people is continuous. The form of government changed but the nation persisted. Twice during the century preceding the Revolution the Church of Scotland was under Presbyterian government and twice under Episcopal government. But the Church was continuous. There was no question at any time of overthrowing one Church and substituting another in its place any more than there had been at the time of the Reformation. This is illustrated by the fact that there are extant a good many continuous records of Church Courts throughout the whole century without any break, and sometimes, indeed, with very scanty reference to ecclesiastical troubles or changes. These are undoubtedly records of the Church of Scotland, for they are the records of her Courts, which still exist. But they are also records of the Scottish Episcopal Church, for many of them are the records of Courts recognised and sanctioned under episcopacy and indeed at some of which Bishops presided.

The question of the relative strength of the two parties in the one Church who respectively favoured Episcopacy and Presbytery has in recent years been matter of much dispute. There can, I think, be little doubt that an exaggerated view as to the almost universal predominance of zeal for Presbytery was taken at one time under the influence of the almost complete triumph of the system. A very considerable portion of the population was quite willing to acquiesce in either system. The difference was that there were far more people intensely zealous for

Presbytery than there were for Episcopacy. Very few were prepared to take to the hills for the latter. Yet it is indubitable that in some parts of the country the change to Presbytery ran counter to popular preference, and in most parts there was a certain body of opinion in the same direction.

How came it, therefore, that the Presbyterian system of government in the Church was almost universally acquiesced in after the Revolution Settlement? A common answer is that Episcopacy was proscribed. But Episcopacy was certainly not proscribed more severely than Presbytery had been in the preceding generation with a result very different from acquiescence. I think that the explanation must be found in the fact that the general body of those who inclined to Episcopacy were not so keen as the Presbyterians. Episcopacy might be a preference to many, but Presbytery to many was a conviction, a fanatical conviction if you will. I might perhaps have noticed, in dealing with infiltration, that there is a certain counter tendency, viz.: a tendency where differences are not very vital, for the dominant denomination to absorb people, particularly in the case of persons who cannot secure the religious services of their own denomination. The son of a Wesleyan who settled forty years ago in Elgin is probably now a Presbyterian. There can, I think, be no doubt that for a century after the Revolution Settlement Episcopalians suffered numerically through this tendency. Be these things as they may, however, Episcopacy was all but wiped out in Scotland. It did not perish, and nobody can question its continuity or the loyalty and steadfastness of those who continued to adhere to it. But they were few. Just as in the case of the Roman Catholics, there are very few indigenous families in Scotland which can claim unbroken Episcopalian descent.

The numerical following of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, like that of the Roman Catholic Church, is attributable largely to infiltration. In this case, however, the infiltration has not to the same extent, or in a like proportion, been operative in the form of immigration. Other outside influences—social and educational, and inter-marriage—have been operative. A good deal, too, is attributable to a revolt in the middle of last century against the bareness of the worship in Presbyterian Churches, and the uncouthness and bad ventilation of many of the fabrics.

#### IV

I turn now to three denominations which have certain features of resemblance and which have all small but active churches in Scotland—the Congregationalists, the Baptists and the Wesleyans. Every Church,

even the Church of Rome, had a beginning in Scotland at some time. But perhaps it may not be unreasonable to regard that which existed prior to the Union of 1707 as indigenous. In this view only the Romans, the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians are indigenous in Scotland. The three smaller denominations to which I have referred are not indigenous. In saying this I do not mean to imply that they are mainly, as regards their present membership, of non-Scottish descent. This certainly does not apply to two at least of them. But through international intercourse and its comings and goings, there is infiltration of ideas and influences as well as of blood. The three Churches I have referred to all represent denominations which are numerous and powerful in England and the United States of America. As I have already indicated, the presence or absence of Presbyterianism in England and other English-speaking countries has no bearing upon the strength of Presbyterianism in Scotland. But, on the other hand, had the three denominations to which I have referred not had a strong following in English-speaking countries, especially in England; had, for example, Methodism had its origin and its chief strength in Germany, Congregationalism in Hungary, and Baptistism in Bohemia, I doubt if there would have been more than perhaps one or two isolated congregations of these denominations in Scotland, as is, I think, the case with the Moravians in Great Britain.

There was a very minute older Independency in Scotland which I leave to a subsequent lecturer, but the present Congregational communion traces its origin to the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century in Scotland, when, under the influence of the Haldanes, Independent congregations sprang up in different parts of the country, sometimes in populous centres, at other times in rural districts, where the people were dissatisfied with their Presbyterian pastors. Out of this again sprang the Baptist communion as under the influence of Haldane, who had adopted Baptist principles, a number of the congregations also adopted these principles. Under the conditions which then prevailed this last departure had a certain advantage. In relation to the dominant Presbyterianism the new evangelical departure was a case of "coming out from among them," and baptism was a visible testimony to the change.

In this connection a certain difficulty presents itself. The Presbyterian seceders were evangelical and were zealous. They had testified this by coming out of the Established Church and maintaining, by hard struggles in many cases, a ministry of their own. Why did the ultra-evangelical movements not ally themselves with the seceders and avail themselves of existing organisations? When there was a demand for a new congregation and a more evangelical ministry, why was the new

congregation not formed as a congregation of an existing Presbyterian Church? Various causes were no doubt operative, but I think that the main cause was the rigidity and exclusiveness of the Seceders. The Seceders were zealous, but their narrowness militated against aggressive evangelistic enterprise. The most striking illustration of this belongs of course to an earlier period—their quarrel with Whitefield because of his refusal to see that his work must be with them alone as “the Lord’s people.” Whitefield pointed out that work such as he had undertaken was concerned much more with the Devil’s people.

Occasionally it happened that a number of people in a district, under the influence of the Haldane movement, resolved to separate themselves from the Established Church. If they had called a minister from a Secession Church and formed a congregation of that Church, they would at once have found themselves implicated in a controversy of fifty years ago in which they had no part and of which they carried no tradition; they would have found themselves bound up with some “testimony” in which they had no interest and committed to the view that some other body of equally respectable and zealous seceders were in deadly error. It was a much more simple course just to start a congregation of their own on simple evangelical lines and after a model which intercourse with England had made familiar. Another consideration, too, was the rigidity of the educational standard for the Presbyterian ministry, which would have excluded men who were leaders in the new movement.

In dealing with the Congregationalists I ought to refer to the Evangelical Union. This originated about 1840 in a doctrinal dispute in one of the seceding Churches. But whilst this was so, and Dr Morison, the founder of the Union, was a Presbyterian, its ministry was, I think, recruited chiefly among the Congregationalists. In 1896 the Union united with the Congregational Union. Of course there was a faithful remnant. There always is.

The Baptists, as I have already indicated, spring, in the main, out of the Congregationalists, and their origin was similarly influenced. But this denomination probably owes more to active missionary propaganda from England than do the Congregationalists. Their tenets seem to have a peculiar appeal to the fisher population. The new Baptist congregations claimed, and I am told the claim is not altogether abandoned, to be still within the Church of Scotland though unable to conform to its baptismal usages.

I do not know that the modest foothold which Wesleyanism has in Scotland is associated in its origin with any definite movement except perhaps in Shetland. The formation of congregations here and there may perhaps be attributed in the main to infiltration, to coming and going with England, where there is a powerful Methodist body. To some

Presbyterians, who may have been disposed to think their own Church too cold and formal, Methodism made a certain appeal in so far as it represented a compromise between Congregationalism and Presbytery, and sought to reconcile local and personal fervour with central organisation and authority.

## V

I come now, finally, to the Presbyterians, who are represented by no fewer than six different Churches :—

The Church of Scotland,  
The United Free Church,  
The Free Church,  
The Free Presbyterian Church,  
The Reformed Presbyterian Church,  
The Original Secession Church.

All these Churches, along with the Scottish Episcopal Church, are continuous with the Church of Scotland as it existed from the Reformation to the Revolution Settlement.

There have been four separations from the Church of Scotland by those who still remained Presbyterians—

- (1) At the Revolution Settlement, when the Reformed Presbyterian Church originated (1689) ;
- (2) At the First Secession, from which sprang the Secession Church, soon to become the Secession Churches (1733) ;
- (3) At what is called the Second Secession, when the Relief Church was founded (1761) ;
- (4) At the Disruption, which gave us the Free Church (1843).

The last three had all this element in common, that the origin of the dispute was the operation of the law of Patronage, imposed upon the Church by the Act of Queen Anne. No doubt other issues emerged in the case of the First Secession and of the Disruption. But the disputes, in so far as they involve other issues, might have been postponed or avoided. Between the first and the second, viz. : the formation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church at the Revolution Settlement and the First Secession, there is a connecting link which is wanting as regards the Second Secession and the Disruption, viz. : that the Covenants and their obediencial character were implicated in the disputes.

The Revolution Settlement was not on the lines of the Solemn League and Covenant, was not altogether acceptable to the moderate Covenanters, and was wholly distasteful to the extreme ones. The chief causes of



offence were the acceptance of the monarchy of non-Presbyterian and non-covenanting sovereigns; the acquiescence in political association with a Prelatic country—England, and—perhaps this was the sore matter of all—the acceptance of Episcopal ministers who were willing to conform to Presbytery. More generally, too, there was dissatisfaction among the older and sterner men against the practical abandonment of the theocratic Old Testament political tradition of the days of the Covenants. A large number of those whose sympathies ran in these directions were persuaded or cajoled by King William and Carstairs to come in. But the more resolute stood out. Hence the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the members of which, while not countenancing rebellion, refused to participate in civil government in any form until both the Covenants were recognised and given effect to.

Whilst the Reformed Presbyterian Church represented those who refused to accept the Revolution Settlement, the Seceders of the First Secession represented those who accepted it with reluctance and were never comfortable under it. It would be out of the question for me here to attempt to discuss the Secession, or its merits or demerits. One or two general remarks will suffice. The movement was partly religious. In the view of those who seceded, the Church under peaceful conditions was becoming cold and lax. But this tendency, if it existed, whilst it was a call to action within the Church, was no ground for separation from the Church. Whilst evangelical zeal and dissatisfaction with supposed want of evangelical zeal gave the movement a stimulus, other grounds had to be found for separation. These grounds were in effect a protest against the failure of the Church to adhere to the standpoint of the Covenants and the views which had then been dominant. In their *Judicial Testimony*, issued in 1736, the Seceders denounce toleration; they complain that prelacy was not denounced as accursed of God at the Revolution, that Presbytery was not declared as of Divine right, and that every minister who had conformed to Episcopacy was not expelled from his living. They condemn the recognition of Episcopacy in England under the Treaty of Union: they complain that a Christmas recess for the Law Courts has been recognised, that dancing is permitted in the land, that an idolatrous picture of Jesus Christ has been well received, and that the penal laws against witches have been repealed in defiance of God's laws.

It seems to me, I confess, that whilst these opinions might with innocuity have been held in a small community such as the Seceders were, it is fortunate that they did not obtain general acceptance in the Church of Scotland. Their national adoption and attempted enforcement would have led to disastrous results, as had happened a century earlier.

In view of the very near approximation of the views of the Seceders to those of the Reformed Presbyterians, it seems remarkable how, for a century and a half, the two communions maintained a separate existence, in some cases each having a church of its own in the same small town. We have a modern parallel to this, however, in the case of the Free Church and the Free Presbyterians. The latter never accepted the Declaratory Act. The former protested against it, but they are regarded by the Free Presbyterians as having acquiesced in it for seven years whilst they remained in the Free Church. Doubtless they repealed it the moment they were free from the majority, but the fact remained that they had acquiesced in it. Such is the view taken. Even so, the Reformed Presbyterians had never accepted the Revolution Settlement. The Seceders protested against it, but for forty years they had acquiesced. They had bowed in the house of Rimmon. Reunion overtures accordingly came to nothing. No doubt, too, "testimonies," to which dissident Presbyterians have always attached immense importance, tended to keep Churches such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Secession Church apart. Each had its testimony which it dearly prized, and the other could have no share in that testimony.

What is called the Second Secession, when the Relief Church was formed in 1761, was a quiet affair compared with the First Secession. It arose entirely out of difficulties over the enforcement of patronage, and those who separated had none of the bitterness of the First Secession. The Relief Church differed from the First Secession Churches in respect that its sole ostensible *raison d'être* was patronage. It was a Synod of Relief, *i.e.* Relief from patronage, and many of the relievers long regarded themselves as members of the old Church, just as Wesleyans long regarded themselves as members of the Church of England. In the testimonies and the seventeenth centuryisms of the First Secession they had no share.

About the last and by far the greatest of the separations which has led to the present state of ecclesiastical division in Scotland—the Disruption of 1843—I do not propose to say anything. The facts are familiar and some echoes of controversy may still survive.

## VI

A summary of the story of secessions from the Established Church by no means exhausts the theme of Presbyterian divisions. There were many divisions among those who seceded, and some of these divisions were marked with great bitterness. A few years ago Mr Robert Adams prepared a chart of the descent of the denominations in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> and the descent of the Seceders is a family tree of extraordinary complexity.

<sup>1</sup> *The Scottish Church, 1500-1920, a Graphic Chart, 1923.*

I shall not attempt to deal with it, and I prefer to turn to a more general question, viz.: whether any, and if so, what, explanation can be found for the prevalence of division among Presbyterians and its violent manifestation from time to time over a long period of years.

At the time of the National Covenant the Presbyterians of Scotland were a united body. They have never been united since. Yet there has been no serious divergence of conviction as regards doctrine, discipline or worship. Any differences that may have arisen in regard to these matters are trifling in comparison with the differences which for a century have subsisted in the Church of England without any disruption or separation. What is the root of bitterness which is the source of the separatist and excommunicatory spirit among Presbyterians which held sway for two centuries? I find it in the dispute which arose over the Engagement with King Charles! From that date downwards Presbyterians have never been at one among themselves.

In 1648 the Duke of Hamilton and certain other Scottish noblemen entered into an "Engagement," as it was called, with King Charles I to deliver him from the rebel party in England and restore the monarchy under certain conditions. The scheme failed owing to the defeat of Hamilton by Cromwell at Preston. Hamilton, who had surrendered upon condition of his life, subsequently shared the fate of his master—judicial murder at the hands of the Cromwellians. In view of the situation at the time, considered in the light of what followed, the Duke of Hamilton's enterprise can be condemned only because it failed. It was high time for Scotland to move if the King's life was to be saved and the monarchy preserved, both of which were the unanimous desire of the Scottish people.

Nevertheless the Engagement created a division and introduced a spirit of bitterness among Scottish Presbyterians, traces of which have survived down even to the present day. The extreme Covenanting party, then dominant in the Church, regarded it with horror and dismay. This sentiment, though based upon a misconception of the real situation in England, is perhaps understandable. The Covenanters, after much hesitation, had cast in their lot with the English rebel party upon condition of the acceptance of the Solemn League and Covenant, which many of that party had no real intention of carrying out. The Covenanters had been fascinated by the dream of enforced uniformity in Presbyterianism in both countries. But by 1648 it ought to have been clear to them that this ideal was shattered. The Parliamentary Presbyterians were on the down grade in England; power had passed into the hands of the Sectaries, whose ideas were as repugnant to the Covenanters as was prelacy. Apparently, however, the Covenanters did not adequately appreciate the situation. They still clung to the idea that the Solemn

League and Covenant would be carried out, and Presbyterian uniformity be established throughout both countries. In this view their condemnation of the Engagement is understandable. But what is not understandable, by me at least, is the tenacity and the virulence of their condemnation of all who had been parties to the Engagement even when the course of events had gone far to justify it. One of the objects of the Engagement was to save the King. The King was murdered. That at all events is the epithet used in an Act of Assembly of 1649. There were two parties to the Engagement, the King and the Duke of Hamilton. The execution of the one party to it was murder. The other party only got his deserts when his head was struck off. Another object of the Engagement was to save the monarchy. Yet, when the Covenanters went forth to Dunbar in defence of the monarchy, they refused to allow those who had perilled all in its defence at the time of the Engagement to fight along with them against the very parties against whom the Engagement was directed.

It is a commonplace of history that, particularly in troubled times, new circumstances work strange and rapid changes in sympathies and alliances. The arch-enemy of to-day is the trusted confederate or ally of to-morrow. Even in our domestic politics within living memory there are striking examples of this. Witness Mr Joseph Chamberlain and Mr Lloyd George. Marshal Ney was executed. No British hand was stretched out to save him though Wellington and the British troops were in Paris. A few years afterwards Marshal Soult was received with great enthusiasm in England. Our own generation has witnessed the Fashoda sentiment and the Marne sentiment in France. But change of circumstances wrought no change as regards the attitude of the Covenanters towards those who had been parties to the Engagement. It remained the unpardonable sin. In 1651, when Scotland was under the heel of Cromwell, the Church was virtually rent in twain over the admission of those, who had been parties to the Engagement, to public employment and the privileges of Church membership. Down to the Restoration, and even later, reams of fulmination were written about it.

History, it has been said, is a quaint humorist. The real head of King Charles was deeply implicated in the Engagement. But the Engagement also became to the Covenanters the head of King Charles in the metaphorical sense which the pen of Dickens has attached to it. For a whole generation the Covenanters found it impossible to get the Engagement out of their memorial. For myself I confess that, if the sins of the fathers are to be visited upon their children in this generation, I trust that my ancestors at the time were parties to the Engagement rather than to the surrender of King Charles to the English.

In the strife over the Engagement we have the germ of the disputes which rent Presbyterians asunder. That strife was not only germinal

but typical. It was typical in three ways. It concerned not any difference in doctrine, government and worship, but a matter of external polity. It provoked violent and malignant bitterness of feeling. It was not soon forgotten or forgiven. These have all been features of our Presbyterian divisions. They seem ugly, but no doubt they are to be attributed to intensity of zeal, which was unfortunately not tempered by charity. I read the other day the minute of a Kirk Session at the time of the Disruption where the wish was expressed that they might part with those who went out as "friends and fellow Christians." That was perhaps a sentiment somewhat in advance of the times, and it is a lesson which Scottish Presbyterians have been very slow to learn. Doubtless, however, whatever may be our present or our future differences, we have made some advance. One cannot conceive of that happening in our day which happened in the days of the Secession, when the Secession Church split into two over the Burghers' Oath, and the one party excommunicated Erskine and his friends and delivered them over to Satan. Incidentally I may point out how the case illustrates the three features I referred to in connection with the Engagement. It concerned a matter, not of doctrine, worship or discipline within the Church, but of external polity. It provoked the most violent feeling. It operated for a century and survived the Burghers' Oath which occasioned it.

Fortunately, so far as Scottish Presbyterians are concerned, the present position is not to be accounted for simply by a record of divisions. The eighteenth century was a period of disintegration. With the nineteenth integration set in, though doubtless it suffered a terrible set-back in 1843. The present position is that the great majority of Scottish Presbyterians belong either to the Church of Scotland or to the United Free Church. The Disruption Church gathered to herself two of the smaller seceding Churches, and also in 1876 the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The United Presbyterian Church was composed of the larger body of the Seceders and the Relief Church, which united in 1847. These two Churches, again the Free and the United Presbyterian, were united in 1900. The United Free Church, therefore, now includes the great bulk of the representatives of those who at one time or another became separate from the Church of Scotland.

It has been a feature, however, of nearly every secession great or small among Presbyterians, that there should be a die-hard minority who stood out. The fate of these several minorities can be traced in Mr Adams's chart. Three of them still exist as separate Churches—the Free Church, the Original Secession Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church. To these may be added the Free Presbyterian Church as being very much on the same footing, although a union was not the actual occasion of its separation.

## VII

I have now, necessarily in a very sketchy manner, done my best to account historically for the state of matters we find in the *Almanac*. The great multiplication of denominations appears to be peculiar to Anglo-Saxon countries—Scotland, England, the United States and our Colonies. There is nothing, so far as I am aware, in other countries quite corresponding to it. As regards Presbyterians there are one or two cases, I think, of division in Continental countries, but in the United States the divisions among them are more numerous, I believe, even than in Scotland. Whether this is due to the presence of Scottish blood I do not presume to say. But a witty American delegate to last General Assembly remarked: "We find that wherever a great piece of work is being done a Scot is at the back of it, and whenever there is an ecclesiastical dispute a Scot is at the bottom of it." Scotland differs in one respect from all the other English-speaking countries. If religious denomination and not ecclesiastical organisation be regarded, in no country is any denomination so predominant as are the Presbyterians in Scotland.

I was present last August at the Conference in Lausanne when the many divisions among Christians was exemplified in a larger scale and in more varied forms than in Scotland. But the great impression of the Conference was not of division but of fundamental unity. The things that divided us were necessarily constantly before us in our discussions, but these were all forgotten and the things that unite us had sole sway in one common worship. So may it be in Scotland whatever ecclesiastical changes the future has in store for us.

Fifty years ago a great Presbyterian divine, Professor Flint, said: "All the differences of principle which separate most at least of our Christian denominations might redound to their honour, and reveal, rather than conceal, their common unity, had their members and spokesmen a little more justice, generosity and love—a little more grace and virtue—a little more of the spirit of the Kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. They might set a high value on their distinctive principles, and yet rejoice that what they held apart was so small a portion of the truth in comparison with what they enjoyed in common."

I recall how that statement called forth from a stalwart representative of the Covenanting tradition the protest that it was discreditable to a Presbyterian minister. Probably our Covenanting ancestors, or many of them, would have concurred in that protest. But the world and the Church have moved since the days of the Covenant, and, even since fifty years ago, I doubt if many would now be found to refuse to subscribe to Dr Flint's statement as a generality, however difficult we might some-

times find it to conform to it in particular practice. There is now very general agreement that our ancestors were mistaken in their attitude towards toleration. May there not be room for the suggestion that they may have been mistaken in other matters? May there not be room for reconsidering some of their positions? Whatever be our own religious denomination, it need not surely be taken for granted that either our carnal or our spiritual ancestors were right when they condemned either Episcopacy or Presbytery or Congregationalism as of the Devil. It may be that some day, when we have reconsidered all these matters in the spirit which Dr Flint commended, there may be some curtailment in the list of denominations in Scotland in Oliver & Boyd's *Edinburgh Almanac*.

